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# A Multi-media Digital Library of Folk Literature: Tradition & Technology

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# Project Team

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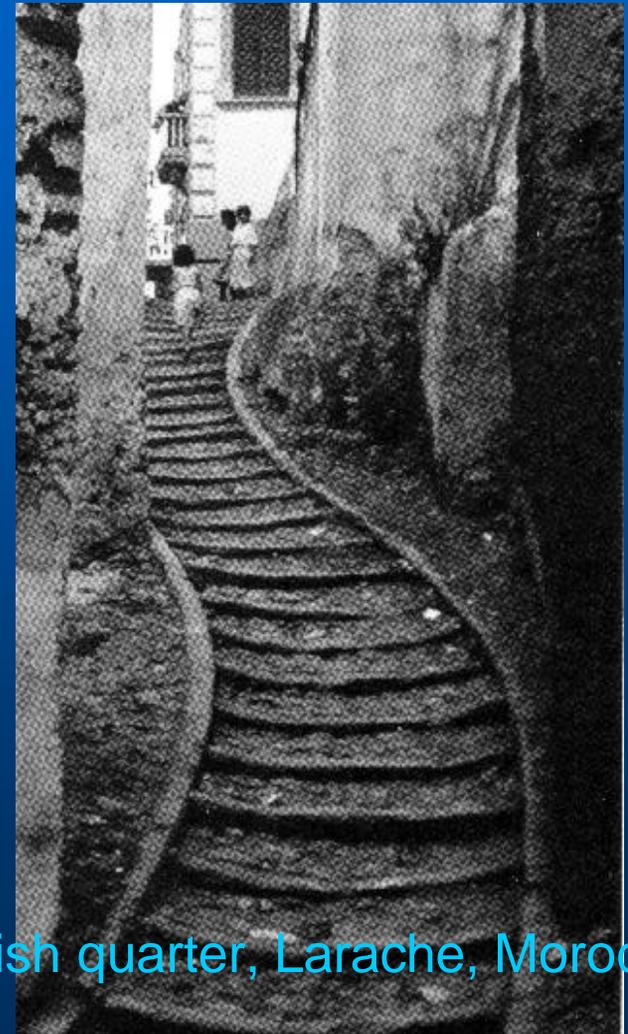
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Home Page: [Folk Literature of the Sephardic Jews: A  
Multi-tiered Extensible Digital Archive](#)

# Background & Description

Over the last four decades, Professor Samuel Armistead, together with the late Professor Joseph Silverman and the ethnomusicologist Israel J. Katz, has brought together an impressive collection of oral folk literature in the Hispanic tradition.

The primary focus of this collection is Judeo-Spanish folk literature. Field work was conducted in North America, Morocco, Israel, and Greece. Pictures of some of the informants can be seen on these slides. Their repertoire of ballads, lyric songs, proverbs, and other material represents a centuries-old cultural legacy of inestimable value,



Jewish quarter, Larache, Morocco

# Background & Description

providing an unbroken link with the world of medieval epic. With the passing of their generation, this legacy is preserved now only through the efforts of collectors and archivists.

The multi-media digital archive of Professor Armistead's collection will allow future generations to appreciate and to study this cultural legacy. The collection of Judeo-Spanish oral literature at the University of California, Davis is one of the largest in the world, and has served a collaborative team of scholars as the basis for research and publications in the fields of ethnomusicology, Romance philology, pan-Hispanic and pan-European literary history, ethnology and Jewish studies for over three decades.

# Previous Work on Collection

During the collection of this audio archive, Professor Samuel Armistead (Spanish, UC Davis) also prepared a three-volume catalog of an earlier and larger text-based collection of Judeo-Spanish ballads, the Menéndez Pidal Archive in Madrid. This catalog of ballad types has provided the organizing structure for the ongoing analysis of the audio archive, and also for other ballad collections elsewhere. Professor Armistead has also completed an extensive bibliography on pan-Hispanic and pan-European ballad traditions which has become an indispensable tool for scholarship in the field, and, with the late Professor Joseph Silverman (University of California, Santa Cruz) and Israel J. Katz (Associate Researcher, UC Davis), Professor Armistead has published three volumes of a projected twenty-volume series, *The Folk Literature of the Sephardic Jews*.

# Ballad Singers (Informants)



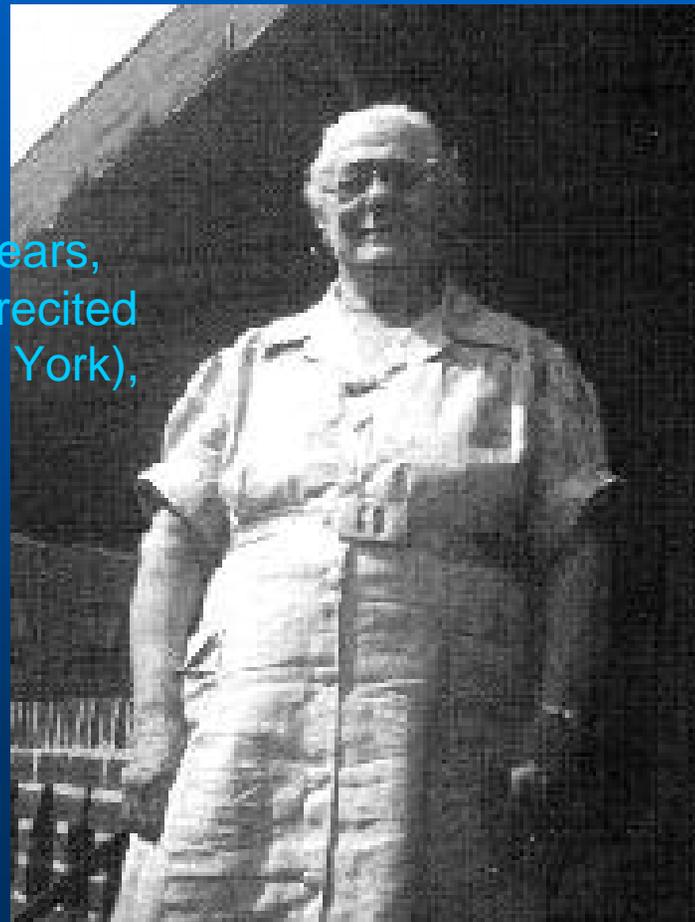
Mrs. Rahel Serruya, 77 years, from Tetuán, Morocco, sang and recited ballads in Gilo (Jerusalem), Israel, July 1978.



Mrs. Luna Elaluf Farache, 78 years, Tetuán, Morocco. Mrs. Farache sang and recited many ballads and ballad fragments over the course of several days in 1962 and 1963, in Tetuán.

# Mrs. Sarah Nehama, Brooklyn, 1959

Mrs. Nehama, aged 85 years,  
from Salonika (Greece), recited  
ballads in Brooklyn (New York),  
August 20–21, 1959.



# Digital Library Goals

The impressive achievements of Professors Armistead, Silverman, and Katz have advanced the study of Judeo-Spanish oral literature, and of pan-European oral literature more generally, to the point where research tools are needed which only computer-based technologies can provide.

In particular, researchers need to be able to access the audio archive and retrieve, through search-and-query operations, complex philological, ethnological, musical, and literary information. Also, researchers need to be able not only to access the archive, but to add to its store of data as new studies are published or related archives are placed online.

Finally, the general public should be able to become acquainted with a cultural and historical treasure—oral traditions of poetry and music preserved for nearly eight centuries—whose living witnesses are quickly disappearing. The present digital archive, now under development, seeks to meet all these goals.

# Digital Library Architecture

The archive is being built around a textual database of ballad transcriptions using SGML/XML tagging (a subset of the Text Encoding Initiative DTD) to facilitate information retrieval as well as ongoing augmentation, and a digital audio database of all the ballads, with segmental links to the text transcriptions.

Access to the archive will be primarily web-based, and appropriate access tools will be constructed, using existing technologies where possible. The power of the XML-Link design will be harnessed through an online editor that will permit researchers to interlink their own data with the archive, as well as to make editorial interventions by means of bibliographic and other annotations. This editorial tool will be the backbone of the “extensible” nature of the archive, taking the archive beyond a static database to an ever-growing information system.